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APOSTLES
ALWAYS NECESSARY

IN THE

CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

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ON THE OFFICE OF APOSTLE BEING ALWAYS NECESSARY TO THE CHURCH.

That which was a self-evident truth in the first days of Christianity, viz., that the office of Apostle was essentially necessary to the completeness of the Christian Church, and that the government, instruction, and care, of the Body of Christ—the Church—could not be perfectly carried on by the Divine Head in the absence of that Ministry, has, in the present age, become a startling proposition and is even denounced as an heretical notion.

Yet the question may be fairly considered worthy of examination, for, if the office of Apostle be not now necessary, the original constitution of the Church must have undergone a change, either for the better or for the worse, that is, either by the will of God, or through the unfaithfulness of man. That the change has been effected by the Divine will is nowhere revealed in Scripture, for there is no definition of the Church in which Apostles are not represented as occupying the highest place, nor any record of its action in which they do not take the chief part. Neither is there any historical account of God having by revelation, or by supernatural interposition, altered the character of the Christian economy. Yet that economy has been indisputably changed, and so far from the change having been for the better, the state of things produced under it has been such, that the question forces itself upon every enquiring mind, “Why do such fruits grow in the garden of the Lord?” To which the plain answer seems to be, “Because the Divine plan has been rejected, and human schemes substituted, which have issued in the natural results of darkness and confusion.”

On the ground, then, that the organization of the Church, as given by the Lord at the first, (Eph. iv.) was His, and that only, and no other; there being moreover no record, either human or Divine, that He has at any subsequent period changed it, while many evils can be proved to have resulted from its loss; it may be fairly asserted that the office of Apostle is absolutely necessary to its completeness and well-being.

To understand the extent and bearings of this question the terms “Apostle” and “Church” require to be defined. The word Apostle primarily means “one sent,” and is applied specially to those who received their mission directly from the Lord Himself, and were sent by Him to communicate the doctrines, precepts, and ordinances, of the new dispensation to their brethren; to form the Christian Church according to the instructions He gave them, not only before His crucifixion, but especially between His resurrec-

tion and ascension ; and to invest with authority those whom they considered worthy to fill the offices therein.

The first twelve were called and ordained by the Lord in person, and though Paul and Barnabas were afterwards admitted to this office, still they too were distinguished by the peculiar feature of the Apostolic Ministry, that of being "sent" immediately by the Lord, all other ministries receiving their commission *mediately* through them. To Apostles was committed the fulfilment of all priestly duties, the ordination of others to fulfil duties under them, to whom was entrusted the general superintendence and care of all the churches. They formed that portion of the Mystical Body which came into immediate contact with the Head, from whom they received by revelation, or by direct communication, the wisdom and knowledge necessary to rule His people. An Apostle, therefore, cannot spring from ordination or by succession from other Apostles. Not so the Episcopate. Bishops were ordained by Apostles, as Timothy and Titus, but Apostles can only be sent by Jesus Christ. Neither can an Apostle come by the choice of any assembly, whether ecclesiastical or political, he must be chosen by God Himself. We find, indeed, that messengers carrying letters from one Church to another, or missionaries going forth from religious societies, have occasionally received the same name of Apostles, but their mission is of men, and they stand in a grade very inferior to those whose chief characteristic is, that they are "not of man neither by man, but from God, the Father and Jesus Christ," and of this kind is the office which is now believed to be necessary to the Christian Church.

By the term "Church" we mean neither the Greek, the Latin, nor the Anglican, but the Church of Christ, consisting of all the baptized, who are all alike members of His Mystical Body. With respect to these divisions of the Christian Church, not only is the office of Apostle *not* necessary to any of them, but it is evident that there is no room for it in their systems. Their constitutions would not permit its action, they have not been framed upon a model which requires, or could endure, its presence. For the ministry of Apostle is essentially Catholic, and has a universal aspect, and claims universal authority, and could not, therefore, be received by any of the divisions of Christendom, however large, because they have separated from each other, having different and conflicting interests, and cannot with propriety be called branches of one stem, but have become hostile sects. The Church, then, to which the office of Apostle is necessary, and of which it is an integral part, is the One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic Church.

An Apostleship, however, is only necessary to the Church for a specified end—for her perfecting. It is not necessary to her existence,

nor to the validity of the Sacraments, nor to the preservation of truth already delivered, but is absolutely requisite for growth, for progress, and for perfection. As in the natural body the principal organs may be wanting and yet life may continue, and many functions be performed, and the lack of absent members or senses be supplied by others; yet a body in such a state, although alive, is neither efficient nor perfect. So it is with the Church. If all that is sought for be the reception of spiritual life by the individual—an assurance of justification through faith in the atonement, and a certain degree of sanctification and knowledge of truth, so that eternal perdition may be escaped, and what is commonly called "Heaven" may be gained—for this it may be contended the presence of an Apostleship is not necessary. But, to maintain unity in doctrine and discipline according to the mind of God, to develop all the energies and faculties of the Mystical Body by keeping each part in its proper place, and causing all to work together in harmony, without the depression of some, and the undue exaltation of others, so that it may grow up into the "perfect man," the office of Apostle is absolutely necessary.

The office of Apostle, then, of which we speak, is that which owes its being to the express call of God, whose mission is to the whole Church, and not to any party in it, and whose peculiar duty is to perfect and prepare it to meet the Lord.

In order to estimate truly the value of such a Ministry to the Church, let us take a catholic view of her real condition. If any member of one of the divisions of the Church regard his brethren with a sectarian eye, he may quickly discern the evils and shortcomings of other bodies of Christians, while blind towards those of that to which he himself belongs; we may deplore the inconsistencies of opponents, while we justify the like in ourselves; we may even boast of our advancement and success, and glory in our purity and order, while the baptized—as a whole—are a mass of abomination, heresy, and confusion.

For example, Protestants congratulate themselves upon the spread of Gospel truth and the growth of vital Christianity at the very time they are denouncing the doctrines of Rome, and demonstrating to their own satisfaction, at least, the falsity and wickedness of the Papal system.

Roman Catholics hold up to ridicule the contradictory confessions of faith, the diverse modes of worship, and the conflicting interests among Protestants, while they pride themselves upon the beauty of their order and the integrity of their union. Churchmen (as those professing the form of religion, established by law, in every country call themselves) point the finger of scorn at the

weakness and baldness of Dissent, while they vaunt the excellence of their own liturgies and institutions.

Dissenters fail not to express their horror and contempt of the worldly pomp and empty ceremonial of the Establishment, while, with the utmost complacency, they contemplate the simplicity and purity of their Reformed principles.

Episcopalians deny the validity of Presbyterian ordination, and the efficacy of Sacraments administered by them ; while Presbyterians affirm that the pretensions of the Episcopate are destitute of Scriptural foundation, and the authority claimed by it a gross usurpation over their brethren in the ministry ; yet neither feel the presumption of the other as a hindrance to God, should their own object be attained.

All these different parties, while they discern most clearly, and hesitate not to denounce, the errors of their ecclesiastical rivals, satisfy themselves that the work of God progresses, that His honour is maintained, and His purpose effected, by the fancied success of their peculiar system of faith and Church Government ; not perceiving that the evils which they mark, and the disorders they reprobate, are the evidences of the mortal disease with which the Militant Church is smitten, and of the paralyzed state of that Body, of which all are members, and which it is the common interest of all, as well as the purpose of God, to have brought to perfection.

Sectarianism limits the view, contracts the feelings, and withholds the sympathies, from all but immediate partisans, and renders us careless of, and even hostile to, all who are not co-religionists. Catholicism opens the heart, enlarging the sphere of the affections, so that we can embrace all who belong to the Christian Church in the bonds of brotherly love ; and teaches us the reality of the unity of the One Body, in that, if one member suffer, all suffer with it ; and if one be honoured all rejoice with it.

The Sectarian, standing apart, in his party spirit, in his nationality, or his individuality, blind to the failure of the One Body and content with the fancied prosperity of his adopted Sect, or the assurance of his personal salvation, regards only the extension of his own peculiar doctrines, and the development of his favourite schemes.

The Catholic, beholding the aspect of the Universal Church, bewails the desolations of Jerusalem—the breaches in the wall of Zion—mourns over the ruins of the temple of the Holy Ghost and the dismemberment of the Body of Christ, and longs for its reorganization and restoration.

From the Catholic eye the present divided and distracted condition of the Christian Church cannot be hid, and the chief desire,

therefore, of the Catholic heart must be for Catholic rule to cement her divisions, for Catholic authority to settle disputed questions and maintain godly order ; and such authority was vested by the Lord in Apostles, and never in any other order of the priesthood.

While the office of Apostle continued to be exercised, differences of opinion, indeed sprang up—factions were formed and heresies were introduced, but the judge was present,—the living interpreter of God's will to decide the matter and declare the sentence—to denounce the error and to stamp the truth. The heretic and schismatic might remain obstinate and seek to draw others after them, but the faithful were not left to their own resources to discern and judge for themselves; those who desired to learn were taught, and those who sought guidance were directed to a well-defined path.

In the case of the Corinthians the Apostolic rule was recognized and obeyed, and the measures adopted proved effectual. So, also, while John remained, heresy was denounced and the peace of the Church preserved, although there were already many Antichrists; but, after the death of the last surviving Apostle, the spirit which had been subdued by his authority began to work afresh, and being now unchecked, worked with greater success. Then it was that human wisdom began to supply the loss of Apostles by diverse substitutes.

To enforce unity assemblies of the Bishops of neighbouring provinces were held, but what was affirmed by one was denied by others ; Synod contradicted Synod, heresy became more bold, and internal contests more violent and publicly disgraceful. One great fact, however, was abundantly demonstrated, that Catholic rule had ceased. Each party appealed to the remembrance of apostolic usages, built upon apostolic tradition, and quoted apostolic word, but the Apostle himself was absent ; no arbiter stood between the contending parties, and the truth of God had well-nigh perished.

The effect of the loss of Apostles was most painfully felt in the third and fourth centuries, when different heresies had gained the ascendancy in different countries, and the theological hatred of opposing parties had arrived at such a pitch that sanguinary combats took place at the very altars.

At such a crisis some step had to be taken, and an attempt was again made to satisfy the general desire for Catholic rule. Rule from above had died with the Apostles—that office by which the "One Lord" had governed His Church ; and resort was had to democratic principles in a vain endeavour to supply the want.

To these principles the Church had become gradually habituated; for, since the failure of the superior ministry, Bishops had been forced to consecrate Bishops, (as at a later period we have seen presbyters assuming to ordain presbyters,) equals ordained by

equals, the less no longer blessed of the greater. Accordingly the voice of God was sought in the majority of a council, and that this council might have the semblance of universal authority, it was summoned by the Emperor Constantine, and called œcumenical.

Over this assembly the Emperor virtually presided, although unbaptized, and was lauded as the Apostle, not of man but from God, by his flatterer, Theodoret, and established the precedent for all future kings to usurp authority in the Church of God.

But the patronage of the Emperors, and the decisions of councils could not supply the wants of the Church, for they were not the organs which the Lord had appointed for the purpose.

The necessity for Catholic rule therefore continued to be felt, of which no stronger evidence could be given than the growth of the Papacy, and its universal recognition throughout Western Europe.

A ministry was demanded which could not only withstand the encroachment of the State, but control the Episcopate; which could superintend the interests of the whole Church, and maintain unity.

Who so calculated to occupy the spiritual throne as the Bishop of the Imperial city of Rome? and the legend of Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, having been its first Bishop was easily made the basis on which the mighty superstructure was reared.

But the choice of the Cardinals, or of the Kings of Christendom, or of the Roman populace, was not necessarily the choice of God, and although the Episcopal chair of St. Peter was filled, the office of Apostle remained still vacant.

The general consciousness of the need of such an office in later times is also shown by the constitution of every national Church, where, in order to preserve unity in doctrine and practice within the bounds of the kingdom, (for to that their desires are circumscribed,) the civil government is allowed to assume Apostolic functions, and to fix the limits of the national faith.

Thus we perceive from the retrospect of her fruitless strivings, that, from the time of John's decease, the foresight and intelligence of the Church have ever apprehended the necessity of the Apostolic office as a centre of Catholic rule, and have endeavoured, as if intuitively, in forms varying at different periods, to produce a substitute in the shape of councils, Emperors, Popes, national Sovereigns, or provincial Synods,—although she never sought of God the restoration of the office itself.

But the main reason why this ministry is absolutely necessary to the Church is because it was ordained by the Lord Himself, as the first of four given for the perfecting of the saints, "*till we all come in the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God unto*

the perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ ;" so that "the whole body, fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, might edify itself in love."

Now, it is evident that the absence of any one member would in itself cause imperfection in the body ; and if by the effectual working of every part the full growth is to be attained, the failure of any one part renders its attainment impossible ; and, if certain means were given to accomplish a certain end, the want of those means must hinder its accomplishment.

As, therefore, God gave Apostles and three other ministries to the Church, the presence of each and all of them is necessary to her completeness ; as the Apostle is the chief organ of the body, the effectual working of this part in its measure is necessary to the full growth ; as the four ministries were given for the projecting of the saints, they are absolutely necessary if ever the saints are to be perfected ; and as He gave them, "*till* we all come in the unity of the faith, etc. to the perfect man," they are as necessary now as ever—for that desired object is still future.

This plain declaration of Scripture, the sectarian of every name endeavours to pervert and nullify by diverse glosses, in order to justify the present condition of the Church. It is said, that since the completion of the Canon of Scripture, Apostles are not needed, because the whole mind of God is therein contained. But if Scripture supersedes the ministry of Apostles, it must, upon the same ground, render equally useless that of Evangelist and Pastor, for what is applicable to one of the four ministries is applicable to all, and the argument legitimately carried out, will lead, as it does, to the rejection of all ministry, and go far to vindicate the principles of the Quakers.

We should then be in this dilemma, that we learn that "God set in the Church first Apostles, secondarily Prophets, after that teachers," from that very medium which, according to this theory, has rendered those offices useless.

It is said that Apostles and Prophets are the foundation of the Christian Church, which once laid cannot afterwards be required. True ! in the Church, as it will be revealed at the close of the dispensation, when the dead shall be raised, and, with the living, shall form one grand temple, there will be but one foundation consisting of Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the Chief corner stone. But the Church militant, composed of living men, as manifest upon earth in every age, itself needs to be perfected ; and for that end must have living Apostles and Prophets as its foundation, upon whose twofold testimony every act of authority may rest.

It is said that Bishops are the successors of the Apostles, and that the authority originally vested in them is now centred in the Episcopate. This is pure assertion. As a theory, it has no support in Scripture; as a practical fact, it is untrue. The term Bishop applied to the chief minister of a particular Church is not found in Scripture, where it is always used synonymously with Presbyter; but that office under the name of Angel, was evidently in existence in the days of John, and Timothy and Titus were also, probably, of that rank.

They were, however, cotemporary with Apostles, occupying a sphere peculiarly their own, and having distinct duties to fulfil, and were, as Timothy, called by the word of prophecy and ordained by Apostles, while the latter were neither "of man, nor by man." They were also subject to Apostles, in whose name they acted, from whom they received instructions, and by whom they were commended, rebuked, and exhorted.

Let us suppose that at the departure of John all the Churches were under Angels, or Bishops: in that case the Angels, or Bishops, necessarily became the chief of the ministries which remained when Apostles ceased; but that their absolute rank and standing was thereby increased, or that they were exalted to the Apostolate from the Episcopate, is nowhere recorded.

They had each authority transmitted to them by Apostles, in virtue of which they exercised rule over all the priests and people within certain limits—beyond which they had neither responsibility nor control. It was their duty, in common with every Christian Priest and layman, to care for the welfare of the Catholic Church, but they had no more Divine authority, so far as Scripture instructs us, to interfere in matters beyond their own diocese than any of those under their charge.

They, within their several charges, were a centre of rule, and bound to minister that which they had received from the Apostles; but when Apostles ceased, the Catholic ministry which held communion with the Lord no longer existed, the living source from whence they had drank was dried up, and although they remained Bishops, the organic means of communication with the Head in the Heavens, provided in the original constitution of the Church, had been cut off.

This want, the Episcopate cannot, and does not, supply, and the endless quarrels and differences on theological questions between Bishops only afford additional proof of the necessity of Apostles as the centre of Catholic authority.

It may, moreover, be readily shown that, by no other means than the restoration of the Apostolic office, can the Church emerge from her present condition, and attain her standing.

All voluntary exertion, whether individual or collective, necessarily fails, because it lacks authority, and the most that can be effected by such endeavours, however honest and well directed, is the formation of a sect, purified from certain errors by which the founders had been offended.

The clergyman may reform his parish, the Bishop his diocese, and the hierarchy of a national Church may reform its liturgy and ritual, and perfect its ecclesiastical system, but in such case they only form an oasis, larger or smaller, in the surrounding desert.

Suppose it granted, that the three grand divisions into which Christianity is now divided—Greek, Roman, and Protestant,—may each develope all the qualities of its own economy, and reform every abuse; yet, if their systems differ, and their doctrines be contradictory, although each might boast of its own work, the Church of Christ would still remain a city of confusion. But were they to merge their differences for the sake of unity, or yielding to the strong hand of some mighty potentate, to adopt a common ecclesiastical model, could they even then be assured that they were right? Can the mind of God be learned from Kings, or councils, or national assemblies, or the popular voice? Can such minister the Spirit as Apostles did? Their work would be at best a work of the flesh, and its fruit but a human invention. The foundation of such a universal Church would be the will of an Emperor and the consent of the clergy, not "Apostles and Prophets," and its chief corner-stone the approbation of the people, and not "Jesus Christ Himself."

A survey of Christendom reveals Bishops, Priests, and Deacons, toiling and striving in vain in the absence of unity of purpose, wasting their powers in mutual contention, and thwarting each other by counter-acting exertions. Common sense tells us that what is needed is Catholic rule, a supreme central government administered in the Holy Ghost; history shows that Christian men have ever been craving such authority; and Scripture declares such rule was originally vested in an Apostleship. Thus reason, experience, and revelation, agree in proclaiming the necessity of the office of Apostle to the Christian Church.

And as at the first this gift came by the descent of the Holy Ghost out of the fulness of Christ, and the same Spirit abides in the Church for ever, for "the gifts and callings of God are without repentance," and "He is the same yesterday, to-day and for ever;" therefore, the Church, in this her extreme necessity, has in herself the very source and pledge of its restoration; from which, indeed, she cannot of herself draw forth the healing waters, but God is ever ready, in answer to her prayer, to cause them to flow out in abundant streams.

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